



VA NATIONAL CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS

Research-driven solutions to prevent and end homelessness

RESEARCH BRIEF

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Connecting Veterans with VHA Homeless Programs: A Patient-Centered Booklet to Help Veterans Navigate VHA Resources



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What do we know?

Providers in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) utilize VA's Homelessness Screening Clinical Reminder to assess housing instability among Veteran outpatients. More than 3 million Veterans respond to the HSCR questions each year. Findings from the Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D) study ["Identifying and Measuring Risk for Homelessness among Veterans"](#) (IIR-13-334, PI: Montgomery) demonstrated that only 60% of Veterans who screen positive for homelessness and 40% of Veterans who screen positive for risk of homelessness connected with VHA Homeless Programs within 30 days of HSCR screening, demonstrating the need for patient-centered interventions to improve the HSCR screening experience and educate Veterans who screen positive about the referral and service linkage process.

Findings from the Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D) study ["Identifying and Measuring Risk for Homelessness among Veterans"](#) (IIR-13-334, PI: Montgomery) include:

- Veterans did not always understand why their VHA provider was asking about their housing situation;
- Veterans had questions about what would happen next and what services might be available, but VHA providers did not always have time or information available to address these questions;
- VHA providers and Veterans wanted materials that explained to Veterans about how they could connect directly with local VHA and community services; and

- Having educational materials available in VHA primary care clinics, rural facilities and community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) may help ensure all Veterans know how to access homeless programs and services.

New resources provided by the study

To improve Veterans' understanding of the HSCR screening and what to expect afterwards, this study developed and tested a low-cost, innovative graphic medicine Veteran-centered care booklet intervention. (Graphic medicine is the use of comics and visual storytelling to help communicate complex ideas in health care.) VA Researchers worked with graphic designer and illustrator, Tyler Thompson and an advisory committee comprised of national and regional stakeholders and local VA Homeless Program staff to develop the booklet, ***Connecting with VHA Homeless Programs: How VHA Can Help You Navigate Housing Instability***. The booklet was piloted and revised with feedback from Veterans and Homeless Program staff at two VA Medical Centers and three rural Community-Based Outpatient Clinics.

Connecting with VHA Homeless Programs shows the journey of two Veterans experiencing housing instability and connecting with resources through VHA Homeless Programs. The booklet highlights resources that are available across all VHA facilities. It also is customizable for each facility to include local contact information about where Veterans can turn to with questions about eligibility and accessing VHA and community homeless services.

In addition to the booklet, an implementation toolkit was created for VHA providers. The toolkit includes a one page-information sheet, detailed implementation guide, and information about how to print copies of the booklet and how it should be used by providers. An infographic was also developed to give VHA staff an overview of the booklet and its purpose, as well as information on how to access the booklet and implementation guide.

The booklet is available for download at the [Homeless Veterans Outreach Tools](#) page; click on Medical Booklets to find an Implementation Guide with specifications for printing the booklets and a one-page information sheet for providers.

Next steps include making the booklet more widely available to VHA programs, such as Veterans Justice Outreach, and to Veterans Services Organizations and local community Stand Down events.

References

1. Office of Public Inter-governmental Affairs (OPIA) website to download booklet and other homeless resources: https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/get_involved.asp
2. Finalized Booklet: <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/Connecting-with-VHA-Homeless-Services-Booklet-HiRes.pdf>
3. Implementation Guide: <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/Implementation-Guide-Connecting-to-VHA-Homeless-Services-Booklet.pdf>
4. HCHV presentation (begins at 25 minute mark): <http://r03cleapp06.r03.med.va.gov/hub2/app/hp/library/record/visit?id=51843>
5. VA Insider blog post: <https://vaww.insider.va.gov/pictures-and-storytelling-make-learning-about-vas-homeless-services-easier/>